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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4875  
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RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 3482  
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DEPT FOR AF/W AND AF/RSA  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [NG](#)  
SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY PROTESTS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY COMPENSATION  
MANUEVER

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¶1. Arm-wrestling between the National Assembly and civil society continues. On February 19, three umbrella groups of civil society organizations - the Citizen's Convergence (CC), the United Front for the Protection of Democratic Gains (FUSAD), and the Citizens' Movement for Peace, Democracy, and the Republic (MCPDR) - issued a bulletin denouncing the National Assembly's February 14 passage of a law intending to comply with a June 13, 2008, Constitutional Court ruling that declared anti-constitutional a National Assembly bill allocating a benefits package for its members through internal deliberations rather than via legislation (reftel).

¶2. On February 26, the three civil society groups organized a protest march and rally to denounce the National Assembly's "predation" of public resources via the new law. The protest involved several thousand participants, according to media accounts. Demonstrators contended that the new law was nothing but a legalization of the same benefits that sparked criticism in May 2008 (reftel). They believed that lawmakers had received undue compensation, and should each pay back roughly 40 million CFA (\$77,000) each. During the rally, an unnamed civil society leader claimed that the parliamentarians had awarded themselves a total of 4.2 billion CFA (\$8.4 million) in bonuses and travel expenses in 2008, despite Niger's economic hardship, scarce resources, and rising cost of living. The police used tear gas to prevent students from crossing the JF Kennedy bridge from the main university campus to take part in the protest, although they made no arrests.

¶3. Comment: In January, President Tandja refused to sign the GON's 2009 budget law - in which more than eight billion CFA (\$16 million) were allocated to National Assembly affairs - because it was not in keeping with the Constitutional Court's June 2008 ruling. Many believe the Constitutional Court is also reviewing the February 14 National Assembly bill for compliance with the constitution.

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